

The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 17 December 1968



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THE PRESIDENT'S
DAILY BRIEF
17 DECEMBER 1968

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1. South Vietnam

Saigon officials are beginning to think that the "Chieu Hoi" (Open Arms) program for encouraging Viet Cong troops to come over to the government side is leading to increasing Communist infiltration of the military and civil service.

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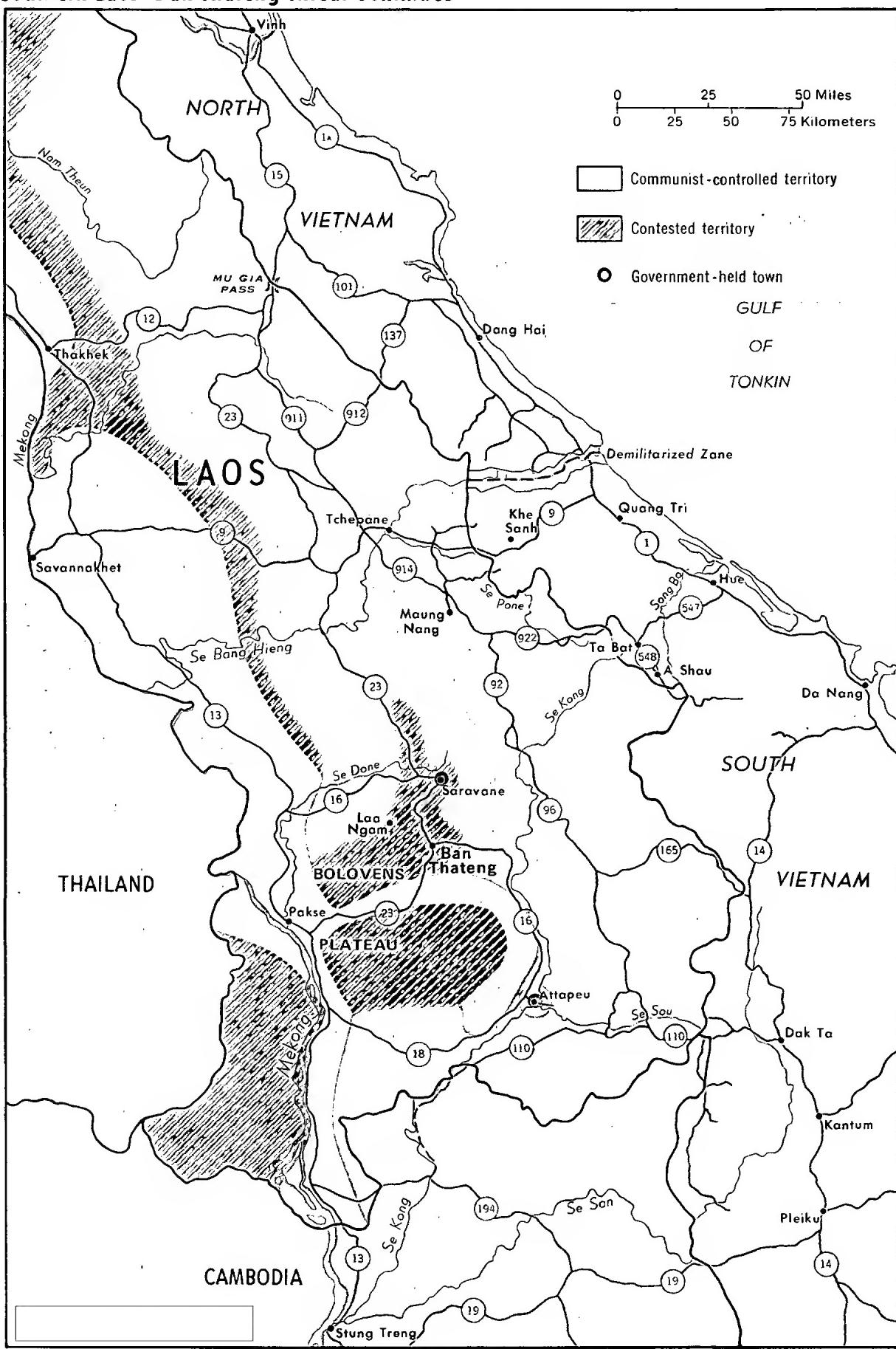
2. Japan

Communists, socialists, and other assorted leftists will charge up their political batteries again Wednesday, when another US nuclear submarine calls at the port of Sasebo. Police estimate that some 2,000 to 3,000 student activists will protest the three-day visit of the USS Plunger, but are confident that they can protect US property and personnel, even though violence is probably unavoidable.

A similar call last May by the nuclear submarine Swordfish led to false charges of radiation contamination of Sasebo harbor. Aware that these charges received a strong response from the Japanese public last time, the opposition is likely to replay them during the current session of the Diet.

3. France

De Gaulle's lieutenants are hinting that Franco-US relations could be improved if cooperation in nuclear defense could be established. The latest probe came from Defense Minister Messmer, who suggested to Ambassador Shriver that France would like to get the same access to US nuclear technology that the United Kingdom has had for some time. De Gaulle also wants the prestige that goes with a special nuclear relationship with the US, but so far there has not been a scintilla of evidence that he is willing to make any basic concessions to get it.

Southern Laos: Ban Thateng Threat Continues

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4. Laos

The North Vietnamese attack against Ban Thateng is almost certainly in reaction to an intensified program of interdiction against the infiltration corridor in Laos, part of which has been mounted by government forces from the Thateng area.

The vigor of the attack, however, raises the possibility that it is part of a wider campaign to take the entire Bolovens Plateau.

The situation in Thateng has already raised fears that the provincial capitals of Saravane and Attopeu will be next. King Savang

[redacted] is determined that the Bolovens Plateau must be held, and has authorized the bombing of Ban Thateng in an effort to dislodge the enemy.

Two more battalions of North Vietnamese troops are reported to have entered Ban Thateng during the night. They have reinforced the battalion which yesterday successfully beat off a government counter-attack. As of this morning, heavy fighting was under way.

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5. United Kingdom -
Nigeria

Even though General Gowon not unexpectedly rejected London's peace proposals last week, Prime Minister Wilson found himself strengthened in dealing with the opposition. He easily beat back an attempt in parliament to force a change in policy toward Nigeria. Wilson recognizes that this is probably just a breather, however, and is considering additional moves toward peace in Nigeria jointly with France, and perhaps the Ivory Coast.

6. Mexico

Politically inspired bombings and vandalism have intermittently punctuated the uneasy quiet which has prevailed since last Friday's antigovernment demonstration.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

- 1.) Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
- 2.) North Vietnamese Reflections of US
Political Attitudes

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Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
for the President's Eyes Only

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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

Propaganda: Hanoi continues to attempt to gain propaganda advantage from the deadlock over procedural arrangements in Paris. In a communiqué issued over the weekend, the North Vietnamese charged that the US and Saigon are responsible for delays in opening new talks. The statement claimed that the Hanoi delegation, with the concurrence of the Front's team, has proposed "numerous judicious ideas" but all have been rejected by the US. The communiqué reported that Hanoi proposed on Friday that the four delegations arrange themselves as they wish around a circular table.

Meanwhile, the new chief of the Front's delegation, Tran Buu Kiem, and his party arrived in Paris on 16 December after a one-day stopover in Moscow. He stepped right into line with North Vietnamese propaganda by claiming the Front wanted the conference to start "as soon as possible despite the procrastination of the United States and the Saigon administration."

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Nothing More on US Pilot Release: We have no additional information regarding the alleged Radio Hanoi broadcasts on 14 December concerning the Christmas release of some US pilots.

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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

There is nothing of significance to report.

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